

# How Many Is Twenty Million?

by John H. Tanton

In this age of millions and billions and trillions, it's hard to understand such numbers. One particularly important number is 20 million – that is the number of barrels of oil we burn in the United States *each day*. (The worldwide total is 82 million barrels per day.)

By convention, a barrel equals 42 gallons. 42 gallons multiplied by 20,000,000 equals 840,000,000 gallons. If you divide that number by the population of the United States (292,000,000), it works out to just about 3 gallons/person/day. That figure is a bit more understandable, but let's try to be even more graphic.

A barrel containing 42 gallons measures 20 inches in diameter and 30 inches in height. Suppose we were to take 20 million such barrels, and stand them side-by-side. How long a line would that make? Here's the math:

20 inches/barrel multiplied by 20 million barrels equals 400,000,000 inches. Divide that by 12 inches/foot, and one gets 33,333,333 feet. Divide that by 5,280 feet/mile, that comes out to 6,313 miles!

That would be a string of barrels reaching from Seattle to Los Angeles (1,157 miles), from Los Angeles to Chicago (2,134 miles), from Chicago to Miami (1,377 miles), from Miami to New York City (1,281 miles), and from New York City to Cleveland (486 miles). Total mileage, 6,435 – according to my atlas.

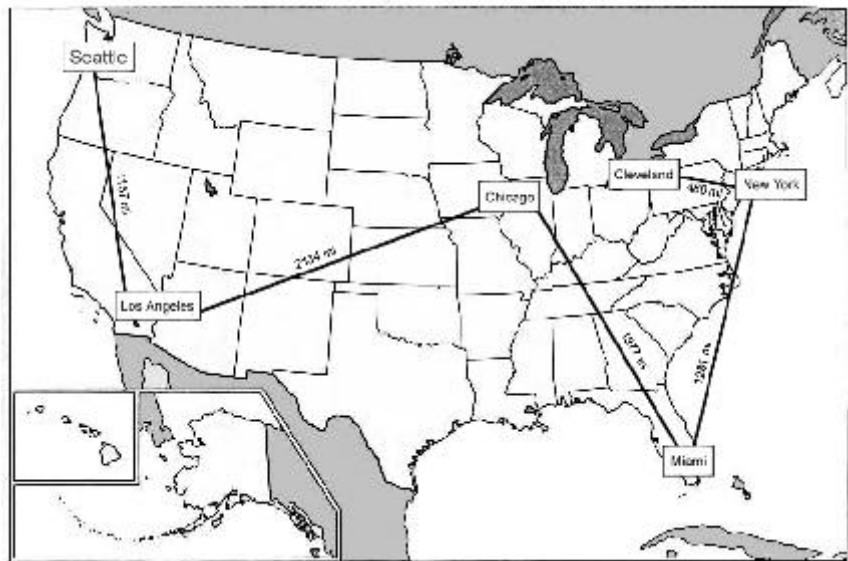
That is how much oil we burn *each day*! The total *global* consumption daily of 82 million barrels of oil would be roughly 4 times this amount, or 25,000 miles – the circumference of the globe at the equator!

How much longer can this go on!? Many signs

are appearing that the answer is: not much longer. Here are some recent articles and reviews we have published on the subject:

Start with the extensive essay by John Attarian elsewhere in this issue beginning on page 129. Also by John Attarian, "The Coming End of Cheap Oil" (vol. xii, no. 4, Summer 2002).

Important books we have reviewed include: *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* by Michael T. Klare (vol. xiii, no. 4, Summer 2003); *Out of Gas: The End of the Age of Oil* by David Goodstein (vol. xiv, no. 4, Summer 2004); *The Essence of Oil and Gas Depletion* by C.



J. Campbell, and *The Party's Over: Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies* by Richard Heinberg (joint review, vol. xiv, no. 1, Fall 2003); *GeoDestinies: The inevitable control of Earth resources over nations and individuals* by Walter Youngquist (vol. xi, no. 2, Winter 2001); *Hubbert's Peak: The Impending World Oil Shortage* by Kenneth S. Deffeyes (vol. xi, no. 2, Winter 2001).

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